# Embracing Death: Pure will in *Hagakure*

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## Introduction

In the prestigious *Nihon shisō taikei* collection, *Hagakure* may seem an oddity among works of deep philosophical or literary significance.[1] Authored in the early eighteenth century by a disgruntled retired samurai of a small domain of remote Kyūshū, composed of heteroclite aphorisms and rants, inspired in peaceful times by a fanatic nostalgia for blood and battle, rescued from oblivion in the early twentieth century to be used as propaganda material for a cause toward which its author did not show the slightest interest, it seems to be there only by virtue of some accident.[2] In this article I shall justify this placement of *Hagakure* through an analysis of its diverse meanings. Without being exhaustive, I shall nevertheless try to grasp these meanings through three very different approaches most likely to uncover them – historical, sociological and philosophical.

In the standard approach of the history of ideas, concerned with the "what did it say?" question, I shall reconstruct the apparently incoherent argument of *Hagakure* around the unifying thread of the "pure will" (*ichinen*) – a will of no specific good, in fact a will of nothing or nothingness, that is, of death. It will be shown that "pure will" allows non-moral principles to coherently reposition notions otherwise contradictory or divided within themselves, like honor and loyalty.

In the perspective of sociology of ideas, asking the "why did it say it?" question, I shall explain the social factors, as its author could apprehend them, that explain *Hagakure*'s focus on the will of death. Its author, convinced that the class of the samurai was on the verge of extinction, was imagining a desperate "identitary quest" organized around the flaunting of the core item of the cultural capital of the *bushi* – the *act* of death.

In a philosophical analysis lastly, I shall argue that the richest insight of *Hagakure* is, echoing a trope found in other authors of the period, a proto-existentialist pluralism in which there can exist several very different forms of life, all of equal validity as long as they are sustained by a pure will.

In various measure the insights I shall develop are indebted to the huge literature surrounding *Hagakure*. After all, not many years pass in Japan without a book or two being published on *Hagakure*, and it is one of the Japanese works most often – albeit partially – translated into English. The largest part of this literature is of little academic significance, being intended for what is today the main audience of *Hagakure*: the *bushidō* aficiona-

[1] Its companion in vol. 26 of the collection, the *Mikawa monogatari*, although no philosophical or literary masterpiece, can at least claim great historical value. In the following footnotes all the references to *Hagakure* are to this *Nihon shisōtaikei 26, Mikawa monogatari*, *Hagakure* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974) edition. The page number is followed by the number of the part or book and by the number of the specific saying or anecdote in this part.

[2] A certain Tashiro Tsuramoto (1678-1748) is said to have written down the words of the putative author, Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659-1719). A number of works have addressed the difficult problems of the authorship of the work. See especially Fujino Tamotsu, ed. *Zoku Saga han no sōgōkenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987) 89-113, and Sagara Tōru, *Bushi no shisō* (Tokyo: Perikan sha) 1984, and "Hagakure *no sekai*", *Mikawa monogatari, Hagakure* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten. *Nihon shisōtaikei*, 1974) 657-61. Tokyo. I cannot delve here in this debate and the exact role of Tsuramoto in the composition of the book (there is no extant manuscript in Tsuramoto's hand, only a number of copies with many variations). Sagara concludes that even if there are reasons to believe that Tsuramoto directly wrote large parts of *Hagakure* himself, it is safe to see it as reflecting Tsunetomo's thought.

Both Tsunetomo and Tsuramoto were samurai of the Saga domain, in northern Kyūshū, ruled by the Nabeshima family. Ironically, given *Hagakure*'s stress on loyalty, it was the site of what was arguably one of the most famous cases of usurpation of daimyō power in pre-modern Japan, when the ruling family of the Ryūzōji was displaced at the end of the sixteenth century by their vassals, the Nabeshima.

dos. Attracted by the "*bushidō* romance" or desiring to spread in today's decadent world the moral values they believe to be extolled in the book, authors have let their enthusiasm and moral zeal take over analysis of the complexity of the work.[3] Detached and scholarly approaches of the book are far less numerous. In fact a search through the well established journals on history of ideas, ethics, mentalities in Japan yields next to nothing on *Hagakure*. This is even truer of Western scholarship, which, in the words of Eiko Ikegami "tends to consider this fascinating book little more than an extremist presentation of the samurai ethic that does not speak for the majority of "true" samurai and therefore refuses to investigate it further."[4]

In the standard approach of history of ideas that this article will firstly borrow, one would think that the main challenge for scholarly analyses would have been to organize the bewildering variety of themes found in *Hagakure* and to solve their numerous, apparent or real, tensions. In fact many studies have preferred to deal with those themes separately. Furukawa Tetsushi, coming back to *Hagakure* some decades after his classic *Bushidō no shisō to sono shūhen*, examined ten main topics of *Hagakure* in his *Hagakure no sekai*[5]. Mishima Yukio had earlier, in 1967, presented forty-eight essential principles of the book in his *Hagakure nyūmon*, a perceptive commentary in which the topics of loyalty, honor and martial spirits play, overall, a very subdued role.[6] Takano Shinji (1997), while examining the polarity between autonomy and the urge of self-destruction, also stressed the variety of meanings and concepts of the work.[7] When scholars did attempt to go beyond the diversity in search of some organizing principle(s), they often chose to disregard whatever fit poorly with their solution. [8] Many of course have reduced the variety of ideas found in *Hagakure* to loyalty, honor, courage or even simply *junshi*, the ritual suicide upon the death of one's master.[9] Hurst (1990) offers a good English example with his analysis of the three threads of "loyalty, honor, death."[10] Some have been more original. The prolific Kasaya Kazuhiko revisited the *bushido* discourse to stress the aspirations for moral autonomy.[11] In recent years a great deal has been made by Ujie (1995) and Nakamoto (2006) of the remarks of *Hagakure* on the sexual dimension of the relationships between lord and vassal, an interesting and previously often ignored dimension to be sure, but probably not the most comprehensive perspec-

[3] Some of this literature is certainly worth studying, for scholars of considerable knowledge and analytical skills have succumbed to this mystique. Inoue Tetsujirō (1855-1944) does so in his introductions to the anthologies of bushido literature (*Bushidōsōsho*, Tokyo: Hakubunkan 1905, and *Bushidōshū*, Tokyo: Shun Yōdō 1934). Probably the best example mixing sound scholarly knowledge with a nostalgia for something that never was is provided by Furukawa Tetsushi, *Bushidō no shisō to sono shūhen* (Tokyo :Fukumura Shoten, 1957) which set the tone for later *bushidō* fans.

[4] Eiko, Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 279.

[5] Furukawa Tetsushi, *Hagakure no sekai* (Kyōto: Shimonkaku Shuppan, 1993).

[6] Mishima Yukio, *Hagakure nyūmon* (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 2009). Especially 29 seq.

[7] Takano Shinji, *"Hagakure ni kansuru ikkōsatsu – sono shisō keisei no shokeiki wo megutte",* in *Kyūshū bunkashi kenkyūjo kiyō,* 40 (1997).

[8] I do not mean that contradictions do not exist and that a unifying thread or an organizing principle is always waiting to be discovered. But whenever we try to understand a text – like a conversation of everyday life – we need to start with the principle of charitable interpretation: with the assumption that it makes (one) sense. For a theoretical explanation of such need, see Donald Davidson on the principle of charity in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 153. It is often the case that contradictions are more apparent than real, and that context and other remarks make sense of them. Only when we fail to produce a plausible unified meaning should we resort to the conclusion of inconsistencies.

[9] Furukawa, *Bushidō no shisō*.

[10] Cameron Hurst, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushido Ideal", *Philosophy East & West* 40, No. 4 (October 1990): 511-527.

[11] Kasaya,Kazuhiko, *Bushidō to Nihongata nōryokushugi* (Tokyo: Shinchō sensho, 2007).

tive through which to approach the book.[12] Much rarer have been the attempts to seriously reconstruct the variety of ideas and intuitions of the book around one or several organizing principles. The most remarkable is that of Sagara Tōru (1921-2000) who re-articulated *Hagakure*'s argument through the two concepts of *bushidō* and *hook* (service).[13] Opposing for his part the concepts of *bushi* and *hōkōnin*, Yoshiake Koike inherited, although in less systematic fashion, the approach of Sagara.[14] My two categories of "loyalty of counsel" and "symbolic service" partially overlap with Sagara's analysis. However, by not going beyond what I see as only a preliminary step in the ordering of the ideas of the *Hagukure,* Sagara is unable to produce a very coherent interpretation. In his reading, *Hagakure* remains irreconcilably torn between two unrelated ideals. The unresolved dichotomy also prevents him from effectively integrating many important features: Buddhism, aesthetics, silent love, identity, etc., concerns that can be part of my interpretation.

Given the difficulties of a hermeneutic of *Hagakure,* some scholars have preferred to treat it as a document of sociological interest, as a *symptom* of moral and social tensions more than a *message.* They have embarked on a sociology of ideas. Through its rich repertory of fights (*kenka*) *Hagakure* certainly could certainly be used to analyze private disputes, as did Taniguchi Shinko (2007).[15] In the limited scholarly literature in English the outstanding example is that of Eiko Ikegami which treats primarily *Hagakure* as a document for an "ethno-mentality." [16] I shall comment on her approach and interpretation in my analysis of the text.

The third, philosophical, approach that I shall take up does not seem to have inspired much research – the apparently widely held perception that *Hagakure* is the product of a semi-deranged mind probably discouraged much goodwill toward the work. When such a philosophically alert mind as Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960) discovered the book, he was certainly fascinated (he co edited an important edition *cum* commentary of *Hagakure* with Furukawa Tetsushi), but he choose to read it as the times were suggesting, basing on this work his curious representation of the samurai's loyalty to their master as unconditional and non-contractual.[17] Another possible source of inspiration for a philosophical analysis is the influence of Buddhism on *Hagakure*, often ignored or dismissed in one sentence, but well stressed by an insightful amateur, Kamura Takashi[18]. In fact, although *Hagakure* was not written by a philosophically literate scholar with great analytical skills, it abounds in sparks of philosophical interest. I hope to show that even though they are not so much the products of a deliberate analysis than the by-products of the encounter of the *bushido* discourse and of some Buddhist insights, these sparks, probably best explain the enduring fascina-

[12] Ujie Mikito, *Bushidō to Erosu* (Tokyo: Kōdansha gendai shinsho, 1995). Cf. his remarks on *Hakagure*, pp. 32-38. Nakamoto Masatoshi, *Bushidō kōsatsu* (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 2006). Umihara Shun, *Bushidō – Nihon bunkaron* (Kyoto: Nashinokiya, 2005) 44 stresses more the aesthetic dimension.

[13] Sagara Tōru, "Hagakure *no sekai*", in *Nihon shisō taikei 26*, *Mikawa monogatari, Hagakure* ed. Sagara Tōru (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974).

[14] Koike Yoshiaki, *Hagakure: bushi to hōkō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, Gakujutsu Bunko, 1999).

[15] Taniguchi Shinko, *Bushidōkō – kenka, adauchi, bureiuchi* – (Tokyo: Kadogawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2007). See also her remarks on the process through which *Hagakure* was lifted out oblivion, p. 9 seq.

[16] Ikegami, *Taming*, 281.

[17] The edition is *Hagakure,* ed. Watsuji Tetsurō and Furukawa Tetsushi (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1940). For Watsuji's view of loyalty, see also Watsuji Tetsurō, *Nihon rinri shisōshi* vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten. 1952) 482 sq. It is of course on such interpretation that the book was lifted out of its relative obscurity during the peak of the ultranationalist fervor in Japan – somewhat paradoxically since its author had no concept of a loyalty to the Emperor. *Bunrui chūyaku "Hagakure no shinzui",* ed. Kurihara Kōya (Tokyo: Hagakure Seishin Fukyūkai, 1930) and *Kōchū Hagakure,* ed. Kurihara Kōya (Tokyo: Naigai Shobō 1940) are other good examples of such exploitation of *Hagakure*.

[18] Kamura Takashi, *Hagakure ronkō* (Tokyo: Sōeisha-Sanseidō Shoten, 2001) especially 179-90. The Saga based journal *Hagakure kenkyū*, published usually quarterly since 1986 by the Hagakure Kenkyūkai, although not an academic journal offers sometimes interesting articles.

tion exerted by the book. [19]

**The Message of *Hagakure*: An Inventory of Tensions**

**Honor and loyalty.** What is *Hagakure* saying? The tensions running through the work certainly do not make for any easy answer. The most obvious of them is that between the notions of honor and loyalty (*ch*ū)/service (*hō*k*ō*). Honor, sometimes referred to under the term *na* or reputation, but usually as the avoidance of shame, *haji,* appears as a purely individual concern driven by an obsessively competitive urge. [20] It is acquired through the display of martial skills and valor – this is what *Hagakure* means by "*bushidō"* – and measured in a relentless competition with others.[21] A samurai, claims the book, should never be said to be behind others.[22] Indeed this is what he should fear above all.[23] It is this competition that brings about the arrogant behavior so characteristic of *Hagakure*'s brand of *bushidō*. Commenting on the common observation that one has to be aware of one's defects, modest and unassuming, *Hagakure* stresses that in the way of the samurai things are very different:

> The just middle is the supreme norm, but as far as martial concerns are involved, it won't do if you are not someone who strives relentlessly to outdo (*norikoshitaru*) other people.[24]
>
> If one does not think, in a very arrogant way (*kōman nite*), that one is a brave samurai without peer in Japan, it will be difficult to demonstrate this valor. It all depends on the intensity of the energy expressing martial valor.[25]

But how are we to reconcile this egoistical quest for honor with the blind and selfless service also required from a good retainer? For good service is repeatedly claimed to entail the abandonment of all individuality and personality and the transformation of the retainer into a mere tool in one's lord hands.[26] The good retainer serves his master

> as if he was dead (*shinimi ni natte*), […] leaving to him *all considerations of good and bad*, giving up his own body.[27]

The author of *Hagakure* then pictures himself as a simple doll (*ningyō*) or a ghost (*yūrei*) at the service of his master, like Ignacius of Loyola is supposed to have portrayed himself – *perinde ac cadaver* – at the service of his god.[28] All other virtues and considerations, and, first of all, the great rival of loyalty that was filial piety, disappear, as this blind obedience reigns over everything.[29] Further indications of this radical erasure of the self are easy to spot.

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[19] These Buddhist insights are quite different, I should stress immediately, from the usual bushidō-zen marriage that we find in works like Takuan Sōhō's *Fudōchi shinmyōroku*, much celebrated by bushido aficionados, that is focused on martial technique.

[20] For an instance of the use of *na*, see 557, XI.42.

[21] Miyamoto Musashi's*Gorin no sho*, where the term "bushidō" is nowhere to be found, puts it even more crudely: "the way in the strategy (*heihō*) of the *bushi* is to be superior to others."

[22] 226, I.19; 260, I.162.

[23] 252, I.117.

[24] 245, I.83, also 256, I.137.

[25] 235, I.47, also 282, II.33.

[26] It should be noted that *chū* in *Hagakure* is not so much the loyalty to a house – a common understanding in Tokugawa samurai society – than loyalty to an individual. There was, as I argue elsewhere ("Loyalty in samurai discourse", *Japanese Studies* 27, No 2 (2007): 139-154), no universally accepted understanding of *chū*. The requirements of service, as well as its objects, were all open to negotiations and interpretations of interested parties. Frequent ethical dilemma would typically give rise to different answers. Manuals of casuistic even existed for this sort of contingency. Good examples are Asami Keisai, *Chūkō ruisetsu* (Tokyo: Sanshodō Azusa, 1870) and Hayashi Razan, *Jumon shimonroku,* in *Zoku Nihon jurinsōsho,* vol. 2, ed. Seki Giichirō (Tokyo : Hō Shuppan, 1971). See also the discussions of Kumazawa Banzan, *ShūgiwaShoin Banzan Zenshū,* vol. 1, ed. Masamune Atsuo (Tokyo : Banzan zenshū kankōkai, 1940-42) 272-3. But authors had a considerable latitude to define *chū*, just like any other concept.

[27] 221, I.7; 223, I.9.

[28] 254, I.127 and 230, I.35.

[29] 226, I.19; 229, I.31.

Service is so blind that it should be gratuitous, that is, never a function of favors received[30]. *Hagakure* claims and repeats that any expectation of reward, any favor indeed, destroys true service.[31] Suggesting that retainer service was in fact usually understood as being conditional on reward or favor, *Hagakure* even urges samurai to forget any conscience of "being loyal", and only to serve selflessly without the least expectation.[32] Indeed serving a harsh, unreasonable and ungrateful master is a wonderful opportunity to prove true service.[33] Lastly, the blind and unconditional or gratuitous service must be absolute: since service is not conditional upon the quantity of favor received, it cannot know any limit. It is thus best expressed in the ultimate gift a retainer may give to his lord – his life. All that *Hagakure* seems to be telling us is that good service demands that the retainer's life does not belong to him any longer, and that it should be sacrificed for the lord at just any moment. "One should give his life to his lord, and that is it."[34]

This contrast between a self-centered obsession to claim superiority over others and the selfless, blind, gratuitous and absolute service of the master is of course is well known to readers of *Hagakure*. We should resist the temptation to solve it through some convenient interpretation of honor and loyalty – saying, for example, that the competition lies in service to the lord, and that if there is arrogance it is that of blind service; there is, after all, no textual evidence for such an *ad hoc* reading. This contradiction is only the start of a series of tensions.

**The Tension within Loyal Service.** Inside the idea of service itself lies thus a tension between the blind and absolute service to the lord and repeated mentions of the necessity of thoughtful and critical counsel. *Hagakure* stresses at times that the "great loyalty" is to offer critical advice to the lord for his sake or for that of the domain, and to correct his mistakes.[35] Here, blind obedience and faithful entrusting of all considerations and reflection to the lord are nowhere to be seen; in their place, skillful counsel, planning, reflection, and ability to maintain harmonious relationships with other retainers are crucial.[36] Wisdom, (*chi*), the generic concept covering these qualities, is acquired through experience and lengthy consultation with others.[37] Arguably,

[30] There would indeed be some conceptual contradiction, or at least tension, in the notion of a blind obedience that would depend on reward. The ideal of unconditional, or gratuitous, service was of course frequently encountered in the moral discourses of the period – and was later often singled out as one striking difference between the feudal relationships in Japan and in Europe. However in practice, cases where harshness, ingratitude and shabby treatment of the retainers by their master all but dissolved the obligations they felt to his person or family were even more common. After all, absent a favor to be returned could there be an intelligible reason for good and loyal service? The *Mikawa monogatari*, written by a poorly treated retainer of the Tokugawa, shows vividly through its repeated injunctions to resist the temptations of disloyalty that any perception that the lord was not observing his part of a tacit contract endangered the relationship.

[31] 297, II.99; 300, II.110.

[32] 573, XI.139.

[33] 262, I. 175; 503, IX.24. However, because the idea of an obligation of loyalty would remain unintelligible if not for some favor received at some time, *Hagakure* repeatedly justifies the obligation of good service by one original favor – an appointment, a gift, a stipend, etc. (for example, 248, I.94; 289, II.62).

[34] 224, I.12.

[35] 258, I.150. For the "great loyalty", see 312-13, II.140; 554, XI.28.

[36] 217, I.15; 233, I.44; 571, XI. 129.

[37] 275, II.7. The thoughtful form of service, however, abounds in fakes, says *Hagakure*. Many retainers, hoping to pass themselves off as loyal and courageous, publicly remonstrate with their lord, and make their advice known far and wide. Even when the counsel is sound, they risk antagonizing their master, forcing him to make humiliating retreat or to look like a fool. Their attitude is self-interested and does not belong to the category of good and loyal service (233, I.43). There is thus an art of giving advice, an art to which some of the most interesting and thoughtful pages of *Hagakure* are devoted (256, I.136; 258-9, I.152-4). As its author remarks, advice is something that, despite their usual protestations to the contrary, people do not like to hear (see 224, I.14, and 233, I.43). The main point is to give advice or remonstrate in private and let the master take all the credit for sound decisions.

all this fits very poorly with blind loyalty and also with the obsessive self centered pursuit of fame. [38] This is because the best service is discreet. It should be "service from the shadow" (*kage no hōkō*).[39] This obviously means that truly excellent retainers may remain unknown to outsiders (*ibid.).* And it also means that not only is fame forgotten, but that dishonor may be incurred: if, in spite of *private* counsel, their lord persist in evil ways, good retainers should try to hide them, and if need be, shoulder the *public* blame and shame.[40]

**The Frenzy to Die and Other Considerations**. Tensions continue in the state of mind that *Hagakure* calls *shinigurui*, the "frenzy to die", a deeply irrational, self-destructive urge that ostensibly rejects all moral considerations, most notably those we have just seen. It is the attitude of the samurai who has given up reflection, calculations, planning, moral concerns and expectations (of victory especially) to throw himself furiously into a hopeless fight. While the term *shinigurui* makes its appearance well into *Hagakure*, the idea is explicitly expressed at the outset in the famous second aphorism: "The way of the warrior (*bushidō*) is to be found in death. It consists, whenever there is a choice, of settling for death. That is all there is to it. One has decided and moves forward."[41] There *Hagakure* mentions the madness, *kichigai,* involved in this pursuit of death, an expression that will appear repeatedly afterward.[42]

> At any rate, just go to the end, to the madness, throw your life away, and that is it.[43]

When the expression *shinigurui* appears, the author is even more explicit:

> There is no need for loyalty or for filial piety; *bushidō* is about the frenzy to die.[44]

As his choice of terms shows, the author wanted to stress the problematic dimension of this sort of behavior. Neither a suicide born out of despair, nor some sort of risk taking for the sake of an end – attitudes that may be meaningful –, the frenzy to die, as an aimless enthusiastic embrace of death, is certainly very puzzling.

> Even when you stand no chance, attack. There is no need here for wisdom nor prowess. The hero (*kusemono*) gives no thought to victory or defeat. Without a moment's hesitation he is possessed by the frenzy to die.[45]

It is tempting to link the frantic urge to die to the notion of honor. Honor after all was acquired through the display of courage, that is, the willingness to unflinchingly confront death.[46] Indeed, "The

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[38] Here again there would not be the slightest textual evidence for another tempting *ad hoc* interpretation that would consider that it is in offering counsel that the retainer should be like a doll! Such is the problem with Maruyama Masao's interpretation of *Hagakure* in his classic study, *Chūsei to hangyaku* (Tokyo: ChikumaShobō, 1992) cf. 19. Passages where the retainer is presented as standing up to his lord do not simply erase those where he is said just as clearly to have abandoned not only self interest but also all moral consideration and reflection. A good proof is in the fact that the two types of loyalty are explicitly opposed in *Hagakure* (see below).

[39] 574, XI.139

[40] 306, II.129

[41] 220, I.2.

[42] Some commentators and translators try to weaken the import of the term *shinigurui*, suggesting that this refers merely to a bold decision to die (cf. the note of the Nihon shisōtaikei edition, p. 251, which explains *shinigurui* as "*susunde shiji ni totsunyū suru koto*"); but the dimension of irrationality and insanity is too explicitly suggested by the concurrent term of *kichigai* (occurrences of which are quite frequent, as in p. 251, I-113; 303, I.118), and by Tsunetomo's constant rejection of rationality and calculation to make such interpretation plausible. True, the expression *shinigurui* is difficult to translate. It has been made semi-popular by a semi-famous anime (*Shigurui*, 2007), but it has not entered everyday Japanese language. I take it as meaning a frenzy to die at the first opportunity, given the slightest motive, and regardless of the possible outcome.

[43] 267, I.193.

[44] 251-52, I.113.

[45] 252 , I.55.

[46] The oldest signs – that we see in the *Taiheiki* for example, well before the appearance of the expression *bushidō* – of some awareness by warriors that theirs was a specific way, *michi,* refer to this

way *not to be shamed* is different (from victory or defeat); it merely consists in (fighting to) death."[47] Further, of the single-minded pursuit of death, *Hagakure* affirms that "It is madness, but there is no *shame* should one die without having achieved one's goal."[48]However, the constant rejection of any concern for outcome, for victory – "Victory and defeat are matters of the temporary forces of circumstances."[49] – lends to this form of honor a very distinctive tonality, obsessed simply with the urge to die before the others.[50] This frantic death, totally unconcerned with the outcome, is what contemporaries called *inujini*, the dog's death, the utterly vain and useless death, the death that serves no purpose and helps no one. This also is claimed explicitly in the opening statement:

> The idea that dying without achieving one's goal is 'to die a dog's death' comes from a sophisticated and delicate *bushidō*. But whenever we face the choice (of life and death), there is no need to try to achieve our goal. […] It is madness, but there is no shame should one die without having achieved one's goal.[51]

The "dog's death" simply becomes the end in itself, the object of a furious impulse to death which seems to defy all logic and reason. Referring to words by Lord Naoshige, *Hagakure* says: "One should become insane (*kichigai*) and desperate to die (*shinigurui*)."[52] Later its author claims that he resolved, having accepted this view, to go to the end of this madness.[53] Of course in the common view "defeat" is awaiting, but, as he concludes, "The point is a quick and beautiful 'defeat'."[54]

**The Sexual Dimension, and Various Pleasures.** All this does not seen to sit terribly well with the desire to overcome others, to triumph in honorific hubris, even less with thoughtful counsel, or selfless loyalty for the good of the master. However, as if the picture was not complex enough, another side of the retainer-master relationship enters, the sexual dimension of the servant/master relationship. One of the most notorious aspects of *Hagakure* today is that it abounds in mentions of the widespread homosexual practices among samurai.[55] It is clear, further, that those relationships are necessarily also hierarchical relationships between partners of different ages.[56] It is in fact often the case that these are relationships between a master and his retainer(s), strong enough to push the retainer to suicide upon the death of his lover.[57] Even here however some internal tension appears, for the emotional attachment is also said to be best left secret

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way as being characterized by the absence of the fear of death. In *Hagakure* indeed it is exceptional to see observance of moral virtues become the criterion of honor. True the book seems to quote approvingly Kusunoki Masashige, the famous Emperor loyalist: "to surrender – whether as a trick or a ploy, or in the interest of the lord – is something a *bushi* simply does not do." (259, I-158), because, presumably, such conduct would be unbefitting a samurai. These considerations however do not play any important role in the conception of honor in *Hagakure* which clearly inherits of an old tradition in samurai values which condones deception and lies as legitimate means in battle or quarrels (265, I.189; 555, XI.32). Its author would have been quite startled by the later, and deceptive, image of the noble and generous warrior.

[47] 237, I.55; also pp. 220, 225, 237.

[48] 220, I-2.

[49]237, I.55.

[50]260, I. 162.

[51] 220, I.2.

[52] 251, I.113.

[53] 303, II.118.

[54] 300, II.108. Once a fight is started, however ill fated it may be, *Hagakure* leaves no room for calculations and tactical retreat. The first setback is irremediable for it cannot be integrated in long term planning: it is important never to be in a position of inferiority, never to be on the losing side, even if you can expect to win in the end, because if the fight is stopped then, it is your loss (245, I-84). The paradox is that one should refuse to retreat even if this is the way to insure victory, thus making death certain!

[55] 264, I-181; 569, XI.115. While it was not unusual to compare the relationship between a retainer and his lord to that of a husband and his wife (cf. Izawa Banryū, *Bunshi kun,* in *Kinsei buke kyōiku shisō* vol. 3 (Tokyo: Nihon toshosentâ, 1979) 152), this was made for the purpose of expressing a social, hierarchical relationship, not a sexual one.

[56] 263-4, I-180.

[57] 290, II.64; 467, VIII.25; 563, XI.83.

and silent: "True love is silent love" (*shinobu koi*), the sort of love that you deny even when asked by the object of the attachment.[58]

Should the reader find those injunctions somewhat puzzling, what will s/he think of one last recommendation – since its author seems now to be saying that, after all, we should only do what we like, and that obviously we all have very different tastes?

> A man's life is really short. It is best he does what he likes. It would be silly to spend one life in this dream-like world doing things one does not like, looking at sufferings. But because this (observation), when one takes it improperly, may lead to harm, it should not be told to the likes of young people and kept for one self. I like to sleep. And now, as is appropriate to my condition, I intend to spend more and more time inside to sleep.[59]

It is not necessary to stress how incoherent a picture all these traits form. Kamura rightly described *Hagakure* as a "bundle of contradictions" – *mujun no katamari*.[60] What principle could order and tie together in some coherent way injunctions to be modest yet arrogant, thoughtful yet brash and impulsive, calculating yet disregarding outcome, blind yet discerning, desperate to overcome others yet happy to be defeated in a beautiful way, in love but silent or only willing to die, selflessly devoted, yet doing only what one likes? If, following a common intuition, we interpret honor as being fulfilled in loyal service, how do we explain the frenzy to die, the urge toward a meaningless death, or the two opposed types of service?[61]

**Reconciling the Tensions**

**The Importance of Positions** A first step toward reducing the contradictions is to look at the various positions of the samurai to whom these injunctions are addressed. As they appear to be addressed to different people in different positions, they, in fact, may not be in competition. Ultimately we shall see that not only we can order these injunctions as function of a hierarchy, but that we can also unify them more strongly as different but equally valid attitudes as long as they are willed by a pure will.

Positions appear, with explicit mentions of their role in solving the contradictions, in *Hagakure*'s discussions of the different forms of service or loyalty. There is, on the one hand a blind obedience, where the retainer is a ghost, a corpse or a puppet following the lord, right or wrong, and is always eager to embrace death; on the other, thoughtful advice, remonstrance, and consideration of the good of the lord. Typically this tension has been glossed over, authors choosing to look only at one side of service. Kasaya, for example, having quoted some of the passages pointing to blind loyalty, stresses others in favor of the loyalty of counsel to argue that here resides the true conception of loyalty articulated in *Hagakure*.[62] Ikegami seems to be doing the same thing, and certainly does not explain the articulation between the two forms of service.[63] But it is simply impossible to subsume all forms of loyalty under the loyalty of counsel. Firstly, the corpse of blind obedience is said to have given up all judgment.[64] Secondly, irrationality and disregard for outcome are too often extolled. Lastly there exists a very convincing explanation for the existence of, and even the need for, two very different types of service. *Hagakure* says quite explicitly that service to one's master should be expressed in different forms across the complex scale where samurai were

[58] 273, II.2; 289, II.62. On denial of love: 282, II.34. Even when no overt sexual dimension is present, the emotional bond, typically spurred by an insignificant favor of the lord, is repeatedly mentioned in *Hagakure*.

[59] 295, II.86.

[60] Kamura 2001, 289.

[61] The contradictions are such that it is very unlikely that taking into account of the situation when one has to be modest (in offering counsel) yet arrogant (in the quest for honor), thoughtful (of the good of the domain) yet brash and impulsive (in the constant competition of samurai life), calculating (the benefit expected for one lord) yet disregarding outcome (in the frenzy), blind (in following one's lord's good or bad intentions) yet discerning (in trying to steer him toward better ways), etc., would help solve these difficulties. People do not change psychological structure that easily.

[62] Kasaya 2007, 38.

[63] Ikegami 1995, 292.

[64] 223, I.9

ranked. In the samurai's military and bureaucratic organization attitudes and forms of service toward the lord, or toward each other, were minutely regulated and differentiated in function by hierarchical distance. Thus, contrary to appearances, *Hagakure* is not contradicting itself when, having claimed that the good samurai, like a ghost or a puppet, has entrusted to his lord all considerations of good and evil, it also says that the good samurai should think and consider the best course for his master, and should offer counsel. There is no contradiction simply because these *bushi* were different persons. It was not the job of a low ranking samurai to offer advice, to be concerned by the good of the domain, to express opinions on this matter, etc. That was the exclusive responsibility of the closest aides of a daimyō, a fact that *Hagakure* stresses explicitly and repeatedly.[65] The two different forms of service are thus closely determined by difference in standing and proximity to the lord. I shall call these two forms of service "loyalty of counsel" on the one side, and "symbolic" or "virtual service" on the other.

The former notion is straightforward: the loyalty of counsel is basically the thoughtful loyalty mentioned above, owed by dignitaries and high placed confidants. It consists in sound but discreet and private advice, complemented by the willingness to hide the lord's defects if he does not make amends and even to publicly shoulder the blame.

It is the latter type of service, owed by low ranking *hōkōnin,* which proves to be the most intriguing – for what sort of service could lower ranking samurai offer in peaceful Tokugawa times? Without particular ability or talents they were condemned to silence. Notoriously underemployed, they were often reduced to the condition of *rōnin*, as so many anecdotes make clear. If they were lucky they would have a job – in the kitchen, the stable, or in some obscure office. All they could do there was to perform as conscientiously as they could whatever task they had been assigned.

However, it is in the service of those disempowered retainers that many of the puzzling features we have observed above are at last reconciled. The blind obedience of the doll or the ghost, which has given up all considerations of right or wrong, is there allied firstly and most obviously to the intensely emotional attachment to the master. In fact only this emotional investment seems to be able to explain and justify the total absence of reward, and the unconditional and absolute character of the subordination. At the same time this very unbalance seems to demand that the emotional attachment is best kept silent. Often, at the death of the master, the souvenir of an insignificant favor, even comical in its insignificance, a favor unthinkingly given by the lord to a retainer whose existence he was barely aware of, becomes in the anecdotes of *Hagakure* the trigger of a resolution of *junshi*.[66] Most importantly, I believe that to the symbolic service of the humble *hōkōnin* should also be attached the notions of honor and the frenzy to die, and their privileged expression, the private fights called *kenka* inspired by bravado, arrogance or revenge which occupy such a crucial place in *Hagakure* (the ninth book is largely a collection of *kenka* narratives). Why this is so may not be immediately obvious. Firstly, honor *per se* is an individualistic concern quite foreign to the master-retainer bond. Secondly, when responding to insults and frenetically engaging in *kenka*, low ranking samurai were exposing themselves to a swift condemnation to *seppuku* They were thus making themselves unavailable for service. However, on the first point we should remember that this honor was the honor of samurai – etymologically of "servants" – and that probably it could not be conceived of outside the feudal relationship. On the second we need to realize that the *seppuku* of these over-numerous and underemployed individuals did not harm their lord – far from it. Their dispensability insured there was little conflict with the concrete and humble tasks they could offer! *Hagakure* in fact never attaches much credit to the mundane work of lowly retainers. For its author the service owed by lower ranking samurai was only fulfilled or proven in the gift of their life, but since the times were peaceful, this service was, in most cases, purely virtual. Samurai were waiting to be useful; they were waiting for the unlikely "great crisis" (*daiji no ba*) so often mentioned and hoped for, waiting, so to speak, to be samurai. [67] Since this was not to be**,** humble *hōkōnin,* were reduced to jumping at the

[65] 233, I.43; 253, I.123; 313, II.140; 554, XI.28.

[66] 460, VIII.7; 475-6, VIII.46.

[67] 502, IX.21.

flimsiest opportunity to throw their life away.[68] It is here that *kenka*, as parody of battle, enter symbolic service: the frenzy to die in private fights showed that the lord had very courageous retainers and he could take credit for this.[69] Confirming the importance of the unthinking and honorific frenzy for humble retainers more than willing to engage in *kenka*, *Hagakure* constantly warns against the perils of learning (*gakumon*), reflexion (*rikutsu, chie*), penetration (*mihesuguru*), strategy (*gunpō, heihō*) and especially discrimination or discretion (*bunbetsu*).[70] All that is required is an impetuous and ill-fated *élan*.[71] "The way of the samurai is about dashing forward, without the slightest hesitation, even blindly."[72] Unsurprisingly *Hagakure* intones in many passages a curious ode to "excess."[73] It thus seems that what I called the symbolic service is entirely permeated by the violent, impetuous, sometimes sexual, honorific, unthinking, emotional, martial spirit of *bushidō*. Martial spirit is the only form that the symbolic service of the lower ranking samurai may take, and any form of violence, including private violence, is easily linked to retainer's service and homage to the lord.

We can thus divide the various contradictory injunctions of *Hagakure* into two different clusters ordered by different forms of service.[74] *Hagakure* sometimes indeed explicitly oppose the loyalty of counsel to the symbolic service.[75] And its choice of terms to characterize them is revealing. I have not, by and large, talked of "loyalty" to refer to the service owed by lower ranking samurai, because *Hagakure* typically does not talk of *chū* in such instance. While *chū* is sometimes presented as a general requirement of samurai, the term is normally reserved for the loyalty of counsel.[76] On the other hand, "*bushidō"*, the "frenzy to die", "courage" are expressions that appear normally to characterize the service of lower ranking samurai. Around those central notions two small clusters of notions then appear: *chū*, advice (*kangen*), wisdom (*chi*) (preparation, planning, consultation, talent, etc.,) on the one hand; *bushidō*, *bushi*, courage, honor, silent love, frenzy on the other. (*Hōkō* is one term that may appear in characterizations of both type of service.) In *Hagakure*, those two clusters of notions usually appear in parallel manner without much contact, if any.[77]

**Honor and Loyalty.** Having thus solved the apparent contradictions between two different forms of service, we can also see why in *Hagakure* there is no lasting conflict between honor and loyalty either. Of course, the conflict was possible. As has been so well documented by Ikegami, the controls and discipline had to be imposed on proud samurai likely to bring trouble to their lord, posed the two notions of honor and loyalty in stark and irreconcilable tension. Indeed samurai treatises themselves frequently recognized that protection of the lord's interests and protection of one's reputation could conflict. Exhortations to act one way or the other were even sometimes offered. In the *Kōyō gunkan* there is a clear advice not to engage in quarrels of no significance for one's lord as this would prevent one from fulfill-

[68] 527, X.67. There a low ranking samurai who claims to have been of no use so far jumps into the flames of a burning residence, recovers an important document, opens his belly and insert the document inside so that flames cannot damage it.

[69] 510, X.1; 524, X.65. The link between *bushidō* and *kenka* is not unique to *Hagakure*. In the *Kōyō gunkan* (Tokyo: Jinbutsu Ōraisha, 1966) we see retainers oppose the *kenka ryōseibai* regulations, which made punishment of all parties involved in a *kenka* mandatory, under the argument than only soldiers rough and impetuous enough to engage in thoughtless *kenka* can make good samurai.

[70] 243, I.72; 265-66, I.189; 269, I.199; 253, I.121, 122; 288, II.61; 531, X.84; 554, XI.26. The distinction between *bushidō* and *bunbetsu*, like that of *bu* and *bun* is classic of course; *Hagakure* is quite remarkable in opposing these notions, clearly viewed as antagonistic to what I call symbolic loyalty. Positive, but rarefied, mentions of *bunbetsu* should obviously be attached to the loyalty of counsel (cf. 275, II.8).

[71] 554, XI.26; 560, XI.60.

[72] 265-66, I.189.

[73] 245, I.83**;** 265, I.188; 268, I.195.

[74] One rare characteristic shared by the two types of loyalty would be the importance of etiquette, manners and careful preparation, as Koike (1999, pp.89-92) rightly stresses.

[75] 220, I.3; 554, XI.28.

[76] 230, I.35; 275, II.7 are instances where *ch*ū is used in a more general way.

[77] Cf. the contrast between 571, XI.125 and 571, XI.126.

ing service to the lord.[78] Izawa Banryū in his *Bushikun* argues more generally against wasting one's life for nothing.[79] The most drastic solution was that advanced by Ogyū Sorai who argued in his sweeping attack against *bushido* ethics, that whatever stupid people may think, samurai should flee from petty quarrels to stay useful to their superior.[80] However, the concern for honor was simply too deeply entrenched to be swiftly dismissed. The same *Kōyō gunkan* that we have just seen warning samurai against petty quarrels admits some pages later that it is difficult for a samurai to ignore insults.[81] Daidōji Yūzan's *Budō shoshinshū* says exactly the same two contradictory things. Samurai literature did not offer clear-cut solutions to this conflict.

*Hagakure,* however, has a different take on this matter. We see in the rare stories where its author pits honor and loyalty against each other that far from being caught in a dilemma without solution, protagonists of *Hagakure* could very well order these moral concerns – because their position and ability to deliver great loyalty determined their choice. Typically highest ranking retainers, or those in a position to make valuable contributions, could squarely put their loyalty of counsel before any consideration of honor. One anecdote, for example, shows a talented samurai dismissing insults in order to stay useful and available for his lord.[82] Most tellingly the great Sagara Kyūma deliberately disgraced himself for the sake of his master so that his impending *seppuku* could be justified![83] On the other hand we constantly see lower ranking samurai swiftly responding to the slightest insult, even when they are aware that this may create trouble for their lord – *oie ni go nan*.[84] It appears thus that in the loyalty of counsel, honor is found in good counsel; in symbolic service, a very abstract and more often than not virtual service is easily subordinated to honor and the frenzy.[85]

**A First Ranking of Preferences.** This distinction between two forms of service, the loyalty of counsel and symbolic service, represents a first step in ordering *Hagakure*'s chaotic stream of aphorisms. But we need to go further, for the differentiation of social positions is not the final principle ordering the different concerns in its moral landscape. It alone cannot erase the tension between the antagonist virtues and attitudes of the two forms of service. The distinction between those able to make a contribution through their talent and wisdom and those only able to throw their lives away was probably often quite obscure to contemporaries. It was even hopelessly blurred when young and lowly retainers were hoping to make a lasting contribution in some distant future, or when some lower ranking retainer hoped to influence policy by gaining the trust of high ranking officials.[86] In fact *Hagakure* several times ranks the two sets of attitudes independently of political position, suggesting thus the existence of a superior principle that could more solidly structure its moral landscape. The problem is that those indications are often ambiguous. Some passages suggest that the loyalty of counsel is the ideal that samurai should aspire to. For example, *Hagakure* frequently affirms that "great loyalty" (*daichūsetsu*) is the counsel offered by careful counselors who

[78] *Kōyō gunkan,* 227.

[79] *Bushikun*, 155.

[80] *Seidan*, in *Nihon shisō taikei,* vol. 26, *Ogyū Sorai*, eds. Yoshikawa Kojirō, *alii* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973) 419 sq.

[81] *Kōyō gunkan,* 274.

[82] 502, IX.21.

[83] 221-22, I.7. True, there is one anecdote where a samurai in position to offer concrete and important service to his lord gives preference to his honor. It is the case of Kusunoki Masashige that I mentioned earlier (note 46). I will comment on this below (note 108).

[84] 469,VIII.34.

[85] The *kenka ryōseibai* regulations of course stemmed from the awareness of the practical problems created by constant *kenka*. I am talking here of a possible moral conflict between the two forms of service. Ikegami (1995, 291) appears to see in the notion of secret love a "logical reconciliation" between the norms of honor and of loyalty "redefined as secret love"; under such redefinition of loyalty a simple act of obedience would become an inner virtue of honor. But *Hagakure*'s mentions of honor seem to me to exclude this: there is no place for the notion that inner virtue should be the source of pride. *Na* is never mentioned in connection with *shinobu koi*.

[86] For the first case: 313-14, II.141; for the second: 258, I.150.

remonstrate discreetly with the lord and never stop thinking about the good of the domain.[87] Its author, who never attained such position of counselor (*karō*), even frankly confesses in that this was his dream and that it was very difficult for him to accept that it was never to be.[88] In one instance, comparing the loyalty of counsel to that of symbolic service he even claims that counsel is superior because the act of throwing his life only lasts a moment.[89] Such passages, however, are more than counterbalanced by others which take the opposite position. In these instances the author discounts the contributions a retainer offers through his ability and wisdom. While still service (*hōkō*), it definitely is not in the same category as the blind gift of life: "To make oneself useful through wisdom or skills is one step lower."[90] The gift of lowly life is placed above the great loyalty of counsel. In another passage about his modest career as a retainer, the author claims that although he did not accomplish anything, he was nevertheless the best retainer his master had ever had! [91] The idea of being at the same time without talent and the first retainer is offered in an earlier passage and justified likewise by the intensity of the emotional attachment and the constant virtual possibility of the ultimate sacrifice. [92] However, this ordering of the two types of service which relies on varying personal preferences, is still rather weak. I believe that there is another principle which unifies much more strongly the two services and associated attitudes.

**The Idea of the Pure Will, *Ichinen***. Consider the following, somewhat enigmatic, passage:

> It is difficult to reject whatever goes against moral obligations (*fugi*) and to uphold these. However, should one think that the supreme principle consists in upholding moral principles, mistakes will in fact be many in one's tireless attempt to act accordingly. There is a way (*michi*) superior to moral principles (*gi*).[93]

It is not clear what those principles (*gi*) refer to. One may think that they are obligations other than loyalty – obligations due to people other than one's master. Such interpretation may find a measure of support in the fact that *Hagakure* sometimes claims that loyalty (*michi* in the above quote) transcends right and wrong (*gi*). However, in contemporary discourse as in the book itself, *gi* was normally used as a substitute for *chū*.[94] *Hagakure*, besides, always refuses, contrary to what such reading would imply, to see any tension between loyalty and, say, filial piety. [95] My interpretation, following the usual meaning of the term in samurai writings, is that *gi* refers in most general terms to moral obligations, including loyalty in all its meanings, and that *Hagakure* here voiced the idea that there was a principle superior to *all* the standard moral norms and obligations. What is this mysterious way? What might encompass and order all considerations? A tentative answer, to be refined, is that it is simply the frenzy do die without cause, without rhyme or reason. This is because *Hagakure* repeatedly places the frenzy above moral principles, as in this sentence, previously quoted: "There is no need for loyalty or for filial piety; *bushidō* is about the frenzy to die."[96] What could make the frenzy so valuable? The answer may be in the following remark: "It is very straightforward (*shisainashi*)", says *Hagakure*, "you just need to decide and do it (*mune suwatte su-*

[87] 313, II.140; 554-55, XI.28; 571, XI.130. The use of the term "great" does not however necessarily mean than this loyalty is greater than the virtual and symbolic loyalty of the humble retainers. The "loyalty" in the "great loyalty" may also refer only to the special loyalty due by counselors and would express the ideal form such loyalty would take.

[88] 313, II.140.

[89] 554, XI.28.

[90] 220, I.3.

[91] 290, II.64. This extraordinary passage is also one with strong sexual overtones: the author imagines himself committing *junshi* on his lord's *futon* and draped in his night dress!

[92] 289, II.62.

[93] 233, I.44.

[94] 223, I.9, 260, I.163; 262, I.171. There is one instance of opposition between *taigi* (great principle) and *chūgi*, in 260, I.163, but *taigi* seems to refer to the formal obligations of the retainer, and *gi* is still associated to *chū*.

[95] 226, I.19; 262, I.175.

[96] 251-52, I.113.

*sumu*)."[97] The frenzy rests on an indomitable and all-powerful will to death.

While the will is not a concept or a category clearly identified in *Hagakure*, there is no mistaking its importance. Mention of having resolve (*kakugo*), decisiveness (*hamaritaru*, *ketsujō*), of marshalling intense will (*ichinen*, *isshin*), standing up (*tachiagaru*), having strength of mind (*tsuyomi*), displaying energy (*ki*, or *kiryoku*), pure intention (*shōnen*), strong disposition (*kimochi*, *kimiai*), as well as disposition *kokoroe, kokorogake,* etc., regularly refer to some aspect of what we call "will" or "willpower."[98] The faith that *Hagakure* puts in "will" is striking. A strong will is irresistible and capable of absolutely anything.[99] As for death, it is the most loathsome thing in the world. Because people would always choose life over death, it is the most unnatural task to perform. [100] The one decision that puts "will" to the test is the decision to die, for here lies the ultimate measure of its strength. It is not merely the difficulty and the un-natural character of the act of death that puts the will to test and offers it the opportunity to triumph; it is also that to will death is to will "nothing." Here the author of *Hagakure* seems to have an intuition of the Kantian paradox that the will is necessarily the will of something, but that it cannot become the will of something without being enslaved by it and losing its autonomy as will: to preserve its autonomy the will should thus be the will of "nothing", or of something as empty as rationality for Kant, the dog's death for the author of *Hagakure*, or the will itself for both.

What suggests this Kantian moment in *Hagakure* is the contrast between the will to die a dog's death and the ordinary will. Most humans, says its author, are *kanjōmono,* calculating people – originally commoners but nowadays pseudo-samurai as well –, desperate to acquire worldly goods.[101] The gain that they seek entraps and determines their will (*tsune ni sontoku no kokoro taezaru nari*).[102] Their will immediately loses its freedom. It becomes literally the will *of* the worldly goods. The will behind the frenzy to die, on the contrary, is not determined by anything else. It is neither demanded (as we shall see) by some hard fact or norms of nature or the cosmos, nor is it bound by some tangible good it seeks to acquire. It is the will of nothing, or of nothingness. It is free. Whether we accept or not that that the author of *Hagakure* had an intuition of this paradox of the will, it is impossible not to be struck by the fascination or obsession that *Hagakure* displays toward the will, by the stress put on intensity of the will at the moment of its maximum tension.[103] Here is what we have been looking for:

> As a human being, what is the important thing to strive for and execute? – To have a pure will now (*tadaima shōnen shiteiru yōni*).[104]

There is indeed no concern for loyalty, honor or filial duty here. The idea that what matters is only the sheer intensity of the will in action is repeated in many passages, and suggests that the will is a principle even higher than symbolic service and frenzy.[105] Life is lived "one will at a time" (*ichinen ichinen*), and there is nothing apart from this instantaneous will here and now (*tanteki tadaima no ichi-*

[97] 220, I.2.

[98] For *kakugo*, see 241, I.63, 246, I.86; 266, I.190; for *ketsujō*: 246, I.86; *hamaritaru*: 265, I.189; *ichinen*, *isshin*: 257, I.143; *tachiagaru*: 574, XI.141 ; *tsuyomi*: 245, I.85 ; *ki*: 436, VII.1 ; *kiryoku*: 279, II.23 ; *shōnen*: 240, I.61 ; *kimochi*: 462, VIII.31 ; *kimiai*: 472, VIII.42.

[99] 257, I.143.

[100] 220, I.2.

[101] 230, I.35.

[102] 251, I.111.

[103] If the frenzy to die appears as a tremendous feat of the will, this effort must be sustained, and requires arduous discipline. Because the will may be tempted by goods, it must be steeled through the constant contemplation of the anti-good, death. Building on Buddhist meditation (some versions of which were called *hakkotsu kan, "*contemplation of white bones", a practice strikingly similar to the "vanities" of XVII$^{th}$ century Europe) and on the different stages (the *kuso*) of death and decay, but giving it a military twist, *Hagakure* enjoins us to meditate on the spectacle of our bodies burnt, cut open, speared, or crushed (572, XI-133). But the purpose of such meditation here is not purely Buddhist. It is an exercise (probably useless) of the will that should insure that through the representation of oneself as already dead the will stays free and unbound.

[104] 240, I.61.

[105] 27, II.17; 284, II.48; XI.141.

*nen*).[106] The ultimate criterion of approval and the unifying thread in *Hagakure* is thus neither loyalty, nor any other moral norm, and not even *bushidō per se*, but the intensity of purpose. Pure will does not displace honor or loyalty, which are largely determined by non-moral considerations associated with hierarchical positions, but it is clearly the transcending principle. It permits choice in the innumerable grey zones of life and goes beyond the samurai group and its ethos – "as a human being", said the quote above. [107] Whatever attitude is adopted by whoever, it will be approved if it is supported by this invincible pure will of the moment. This is why the author of *Hagakure* can openly *admire* behavior totally opposed to all the moral considerations he elsewhere accepts or professes.[108] This is why there exists for him no moral dilemma: when one is caught between conflicting obligations, what matters is not the choice of one or the other – filial piety or loyalty – but the choice itself which must be done with an intensity than can only be *proved* in acceptance of death. As an earlier quote (cf. II.3) made it clear, whoever has a pure will is the *kusemono*– the elusive hero who lurks in so many passages of *Hagakure*.

### *Hagakure's* Sociological Interest: Death as Cultural Capital.

Having thus tried to provide a more unified interpretation of the moral message of *Hagakure*, I would now like to offer an assessment from two other perspectives, those of the sociology of ideas – where the answer to the question "why does it say what it says?" is extracted from the social circumstances of the message and views it as a symptom of these circumstances– and of philosophy – where the philosophical value of the work is questioned.

The sociological perspective should complement what has been said above, for it helps to explain the frantic dimension of the will to die, a dimension which can only be understood through a consideration of the social circumstances experienced by the author. One of the most striking features of those circumstances appears when we revisit the act the most intense variant of which is the frenzy – voluntary death – and question its social meanings. Death of course was a common concern of most of the books and treatises in the samurai discourse. [109] But in the narratives of *Hagakure* we find a distinctive accent on the *act* of death, and find most of its different meanings richly illustrated.[110]

[106] 278, II.17

[107] "In serious affairs in which you are concerned, the only way to settle things is to rely on one's own judgment, and to go along without hesitation. In matters of importance, if conferring with other people, it will often be the case that they will not pay attention, or that they will not speak the truth. This is when you use your own judgment. At any rate, go to the end of your frenzy and throw your life away." (267, I.193.) *Hagakure* many times stresses the importance of asking for advice and listening to other's opinions – this is probably a component of the loyalty of counsel, but in the frenzy individuals rely solely on their own choice, decision and will.

[108] Cf. in 120, VIII.56 the case of a man who robs and plunders his domain, examples of lies and dissimulation excused for the strong purpose they served in 541, X.124; 555, XI.32, or the case of Kusunoki Masashige who refrains from helping his master out of dislike for treachery. Of course, there cannot be any reason for the will itself. Here we reach the a-philosophical, the ungrounded aesthetic dimension that runs through *Hagakure* that explains its numerous remarks on the importance of beautiful form – a subject I cannot fully treat here.

[109] Among the most important representatives of the genre, *Budō shoshin shū* (DaidōjiYūzan, *Budō shoshin shū*, in *Kinsei buke kyōiku shisō* vol. 3 (Tokyo: Nihon toshosentâ, 1979), although of a very different tone from *Hagakure*, also starts with the topic of death, enjoining samurai to never forget for one moment, all year long, that they are about to die. Its author, Daidōji Yūzan (1639-1730), was also born well after *Pax Tokugawa* began. Cf. also *Mikagawa monogatari*, in *Mikawa monogatari, Hagakure*; the earlier (compiled early seventeenth century) *Kōyō gunkan* (p. 227); Yamaga Sokō's *Yamaga gorui,* in *Yamaga Sokō zenshū,* vol 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1940), 35-36. But these works were mainly treating death as an event, a consequences, to be accepted, of other actions.

[110] Contemporary vocabulary sometimes classified various types of voluntary death (*jishi, jigai, jiketsu, jijin, jisai*) according to their objective: sui-

We see instances of samurai having to take responsibility for some trivial misconduct and ordered to commit seppuku.[111] We see others die taking responsibility for a serious misdeed.[112] We see retainers performing death to return a favor, or to express the exclusive relationship with the lord upon his death.[113] We see some *bushi* affirming their readiness to disembowel themselves when about to give advice or to remonstrate, to threaten or to blackmail.[114] We see warriors committing suicide because they were caught between conflicting obligations, a common occurrence in a cultural context where obligations were prescriptions of behavior toward specific individuals.[115] We see samurai throwing their lives away in hopeless fights to take revenge, to defend their name, to restore their honor, or to engage in forced honorific rivalry.[116] We even see suicide as a way of fulfilling "silent" or not so silent love in a homosexual relationship. And of course we see death ostensibly chosen under the name or the pretext of loyalty to one's lord: "the first thing for a warrior is to give his life to his lord."[117]

Beyond the diversity of their purposes, all those forms of death were highly symbolic acts, existing in a social class for which its relationship to death helped to identify *and justify* its existence. Yamaga Sokō expressed the urgency of the justification problem when he asked what could explain the fact that *bushi*, while unproductive, were at the top of the social order.[118] His answer – that they were providing the model of correct behavior – would have failed to impress. That only few samurai could be moral models would have been very clear. The needs of governance could not have explained either the large number of samurai or the incompetence of most. More than moral or administrative qualifications, it was some vague aura of authority that made warrior rule look like a part of the natural, normal state of things. Samurai authority came from many sources, but among them was certainly the constant affirmation we find in the *bushidō* literature of the readiness to die.[119] The readiness (happily, for most samurai, a purely rhetorical readiness), or even the eagerness, to part with one's life was what set the warrior class apart from the rest of the population. It was the always possible feat of self-inflicted death that could justify the special position of the *bushi*. It was a case of *noblesse oblige*, not in the sense that nobility would create obligations, but rather in the sense that obligations invested nobility on their bearers. It is in this sense that voluntary death was not merely a status symbol, but the core item of the *bushi* group's *cultural capital*. In this sense the obsession of *Hagakure* with death makes it an eloquent testimony to the authority of this capital.

However, *Hagakure* does not merely tell us, with much pathos, how important voluntary death was in the cultural capital of the samurai; this alone would not explain the frenzy. This would only explain the stoic attitude of the samurai who accepted that *noblesse oblige*. *Hagakure* also tells us that death had to be f*rantically* pursued. Why that is becomes clear when we recognize that, for the author of the book, the samurai whose status rested on the act of death were, as true samurai, already dead: He repeatedly states that the *bushi* had lost their soul,

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cides for the purpose of remonstrance or *kanshi*, suicides to express spite or fury *munenbara*, *sokotsushi* (not represented in *Hagakure*), suicide out of loyalty after one's master's natural death, *junshi*, called in the *Hagakure oibara*. A good overview of the history and forms of *seppuku* is in Yamamoto Hirofumi, *Seppuku: Nihonjin no sekinin no torikata* (Kōbunsha, Kōbunshashinsho, 2003).

[111] 256, I.136.

[112] 268, I.198.

[113] 527, X.67; 251, I.112.

[114] For *seppuku* as remonstrance, see 244, I.76; for blackmail, XI.65; XI.91.

[115] 505, IX.30. Arai Hakuseki states in his autobiography that only people culturally equipped with the suicide ethos could deal with such conflict when he comments on the case of commoner woman who had been caught in such situation (Arai Hakuseki, *Oritakushiba no ki* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999), 200).

[116] 475, VIII.45; 476, VIII.47; 485, VIII.62; 508, IX.39.

[117] 230, I.35; 274, II.7.

[118] In the introduction to his *Bukyō shōgaku,* in *Nihon rinri ihen, vol 4*, ed. Inoue Tetsujirō (Tokyo: Ikusei kai, 1902 ) 677.

[119] On the notion of authority to explain obedience and conformity in Tokugawa society, see my "Rituals as Utopia", *Japanese Studies* 29, No 1 (2009) 33-45.

their ethos, their raison d'être, their identity. Tamed into bureaucrats, they had been infected with the calculating lowly way of the commoners.[120] Whereas their ancestors carefully avoided all contact with *chōnin*, contemporary "samurai" freely mixed with them, and unsurprisingly acquired their obsession with wealth, goods, or pleasures, their ways of thinking, evaluating and calculating.[121] In fact, *Hagakure* insists on several occasions they had even been *physically* transformed into commoners – or, more exactly, and worse, into women, having acquired a feminine pulse![122] The despair and the urgency characteristic of the frenzy to die can then be understood as the despair and urgency of an "identitary quest", of an attempt to salvage the identity of a class that was only a ghost of its former self, through the flaunting of the core item of its cultural capital. (Granted, the *bushi* class would in fact survive for another 150 years, but, the author of *Hagakure* would have said, only in name, as a collection of tamed bureaucrats, powerless, nostalgic and bitter.)

**The Philosophical Interest**

**The Problem of Death and the Absence of Meaning**. The philosophical interest of *Hagakure* may be much less obvious. After all, there is no denying that the work is haunted by a streak of insanity – in the sense of logical meaninglessness –, a streak most likely linked to the haunting presence of death.[123] The problem is not that *Hagakure* reminds us of our mortal condition. This would not insure meaninglessness.[124] For its author, death does not mark the limit (within which, in fact, meaning is possible), but is the necessary means to an end – the retrieving of samurai identity. This is why, drawing on Buddhist themes, he constantly introduces death into a worldly perspective, and why he can pretend that "only the end of things is important."[125] The problem is that this means prevents the realization of its ends. One cannot help wonder what point there is in regaining identity only to fall into oblivion. Another, closely related, reason for the feeling of the meaninglessness that runs through *Hagakure* is obsessive pursuit of something which, by conceptual necessity, cannot be achieved: the identity of someone else. Making the point that things and beings are only what they are, and cannot be something else without ceasing to be, Leibniz told someone who had expressed the wish to be the Emperor of China that this was akin to wishing to be dead: indeed there is some conceptual instability in any desire to change identity since it negates the agent indispensable to achieving this very wish. *Hagakure* is guilty of such sin because, while it fully recognized that changing social and political circumstances made the persona of the old samurai totally impossible and foreign, it nonetheless kept urging the new sanitized, feminine retainers to be that

[120] 230, I.35; 241, I.63; 251, I.111.

[121] 223, I.11.

[122] 238, I.36; 300, II.110.

[123] Many have commented on this – helped by the inviting remarks of the book on madness and frenzy. In his article "Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushido Ideal", Cameron Hurst characteristically described its author as "a zealot" and a "weekend warrior".

[124] True, according to a common folk philosophy – the most eloquent expression of which is probably found in the works of E. Cioran (1911-1995; see his *Anathema and Admirations*, or *The trouble with being born*, among others) –, since the meaning of an action can only be found in the relation between this action and the ends it achieves, the rules it obeys, or the states of mind it expresses, the fact of death – real death, that is, the definitive termination of all bodily and spiritual existence which seems to have been *Hagakure*'s understanding – by spelling the disappearance of ends, rules and states of mind, also spells the impossibility of meaning. This folk philosophy, however, is wrong. The fact that people, in spite of what it tells them, go about their life as if there was no such thing as death awaiting for them suggests well enough that the out-of-life perspective needed to see death as destroying our ends, rules or states of mind is not sustainable. It is a view from nowhere that cannot have any impact on life. On this point see Strawson's remarks on a similar perspective: Peter F. Strawson, "Freedom and resentment", in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48 (1962). On the absence of any impact of such external perspective on people's lives, see Nietzsche (*Gay Science*, § 278) and Vauvenargues (*Reflections and Maxims*, § 140, 142, 143).

[125] 281, II.30; 283, II.39.

someone else. [126] Its author seems to have hoped to achieve an end (the identity of other people) which destroys its agent through a means (death) which destroys everything.

**Metaphysical Pluralism.** This flirtation with meaninglessness does not mean that there are no philosophically interesting perspectives in *Hagakure*. Such perspectives are suggested by many remarks about the very fragile nature of the *bushi* ethos and on the identity the auhor was trying to retrieve. He affirms that the cultural capital that so urgently needed to be reasserted was also, from a detached perspective, perfectly illusory. The author of *Hagakure* was acutely aware that voluntary death and the whole *bushidō* ethos articulated around it were simply what we would call a social imaginary: a corpus of representations and values organizing interactions and guiding interpretations, judgments and actions in a certain group of human beings, but a corpus of representations without any absolute ground or justification, without reality, concreteness or truth, that just happened to be there as the product of circumstances and opportunities. Whenever they present themselves as absolutely valid, the discourses of the social imaginary are wrong; but what matters is that they are there as a way or a form of life. Indeed, for those whose existence they define, these forms are as demanding as any real fact. What leads me to this conclusion are passages like this one:

> Listening to Buddhist teachings would be an extraordinary error for a young samurai. This is because things would appear in two perspectives. But nothing will ever be achieved if you don't go in one direction only.[127]

What could this mean? *Hagakure* here places on the same level the perspective of Buddhism which denounces all worldly values as empty, and that of *bushidō* which affirms certain worldly values, and demands that one die for them. It does not imply that one outlook is right or valid, and the other false and invalid. It suggests rather that whoever learns to see things in the Buddhist way will not be able to see them in the way needed by *Hagakure*'s brand of *bushidō*. Each of these perspectives is valid, but incompatible with the other. A choice has to be made, but this choice is not the choice of the one and only right answer: here we see how the will is linked to this metaphysical thesis. This pluralism, not noticed in the literature surrounding *Hagakure*, is confirmed by countless other passages. Firstly, this idea that there are concurrent perspectives on the world, that "things appear under two aspects" (*mono ga futatsu ni naru*) – something samurai must avoid at all cost –, appears in several passages.[128] The book starts also by claiming that even if Confucius or Buddha were to appear in Nabeshima family's domain, they would not accept and adopt the local habits – that is the local brand of samurai ethos.[129] There is here no affirmation of universal validity for the local brand of ethics. *Hagakure* only says that a samurai follows Nabeshima values simply because he was born there, while Confucius and Buddha were not. Elsewhere, going against both the common syncretism (all ways are the same) and dogmatism (only one way is valid), the work claims that there are different ways (*michi*) and that one should simply stick to one, and avoid mixing heterogeneous elements of different ways.[130]

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[126] *Hagakure* recognizes that however regrettable was the loss of the old world of *bushidō*, however lamentable was the transformation of loyal retainers into self interested effeminate *chōnin*, such movement was not reversible (278, II.18). Strangely enough, considering that it seems to be attempting just this, it even goes on denouncing people who spend their time lamenting the demise of this world as deeply mistaken (*ibid.*).

[127] 398, VI-21; a similar idea is expressed in 288, II.61; 465, VIII.22. While *Hagakure* would have been a very different work had not its author taken the Buddhist orders upon retirement, the role of Buddhism is often only cursorily acknowledged (Ikegami, p.287). The putative author of *Hagakure*, Yamamoto Tsunetomo, does not seem to have been a exclusive follower of one Buddhist sect: Zen, Amidist schools and even Nichiren appear in numerous references to Buddhism. The idea of *ichinen*, the pure instantaneous will has Zen overtones, but is found also in teaching about the invocations of Amida's name.

[128] 257, 1.139; 268, I.195, and passages quoted in the above note.

[129] 216, Introduction.

[130] 257, I.139. This is why I do not subscribe to Ikegami's analysis of the "*han* nationalism" of

Even more significantly, a *bushi* is said to follow his master even if this should lead him to fall into hell or be a victim of divine retribution.[131] Similarly the way of the samurai is said to be pursued even when it comes into conflict with the desires of the gods of *Shinto*.[132] In such passages Shinto or Buddhist teachings are never dismissed as false. Gods and Buddhas are not claimed to be illusions. They are assumed to be real – just like hell is –, and the author of *Hagakure* even claims to respect them, but while real they are not relevant for *bushi*: they represent other systems of values, just as valid or even truer than *bushidō*, but not relevant for people who happened to be samurai. Lastly, confirming this reading, *Hagakure* never made any attempt to ground its brand of *bushido* in some natural order of things, in metaphysics, like Yamaga Sokō for example. In fact its rare comments on the natural world point to a very secular, totally "disenchanted" view of the world, where the natural objects and phenomena are unable to support the universality of moral values. "Prosperity and decay belong to fate (*tennen*). The good and the bad belong to the way of humans. It is for the purpose of moral preachings that we talk about prosperity and decay."[133] By the same token natural phenomena are merely the products of mechanisms unrelated to human affairs: "Whenever events out of the ordinary happen, to talk of mysteries or of warnings of things to come is a stupid thing to do."[134] If all these indications confirm that a streak of pluralism runs deep in *Hagakure*'s outlook, an even more radical devaluation of all worldly values appears when the book takes a more decisively Buddhist perspective, and advances the idea that beings and phenomena in this world are without substance, that we are all puppets surrounded by illusions: *sekai ha mina karakuriningyōnari*.[135] More generally, life is said in many instances to be only a meaningless dream.[136]

One should note that such metaphysics – what in modern philosophical jargon is called "fictionalism", the theory that states that certain normative or descriptive propositions about the world can be both untrue and valid – is not unique to *Hagakure*. While uncommon, this metaphysical configuration is found scattered through Japanese thought. The Buddhist preacher Shinran claimed that he would follow the teachings of his master even if they were proven to be false and cause his fall into hell.[137] The Confucian thinker Yamazaki Ansai said that he believed in the correctness of Zhu Xi's doctrine, even it is was wrong.[138] Ogyū Sorai stressed that Shinto had to be followed even if its gods were

*Hagakure* (Ikegani 1995, 295-97). Ikegami believes that the rejection of other doctrines only expresses "*han* nationalism". More interesting is the fact that the author of *Hagakure* does not dismiss the intrinsic validity of these other doctrines. The idea that many forms of life can be equally valid and equally without solid foundations in nature is not only philosophically more interesting than "*han* nationalism" but it makes more sense of the passages where the author puts side by side not only Nabeshima *han* and other *han*, but also and more frequently *bushidō* and Buddhism, Shinto or Confucianism, etc., without decrying the validity of any of those ethical messages.

[131] 290-01, II.65.

[132] 294, II.82.

[133] 248, I.95.

[134] 249, I.104. This refusal to rely on some universal justification, and this preference for local ethics and the concurrent acceptance of its circumstantial and limited value, seem to me to have been common in the samurai class: the great critics of naturalist and universal justification, Ogyū Sorai and Kaiho Seiryō, were of samurai origin. The insistence of samurai houses on their own code of ethics, their propensity to stress its differences with other warrior houses may have facilitated this perception of norms as locally – and thus weakly – grounded. More generally of course the presence in Japan of distinct traditions, from Buddhism and Confucianism to Shinto, could have encouraged the idea of competing but equally legitimate accounts, although, more often than not, syncretism or dogmatism was the answer. The fact that the putative author of *Hagakure*, Yamamoto Tsunetomo, himself had made the transition from a samurai retainer to Buddhist recluse is relevant too.

[135] 231, I-42; 284, II.44.

[136] 295, II-85; 574, XI.142.

[137] Shinran, *Tan'ishō,* in *Shinranshū*, ed. Masutani Fumio (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, Nihon no shisō 3, 1968) 352.

[138] Takashima Motohiro, *Yamazaki Ansai* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1992) 8.

lies.[139] Conversely, he added that things proven to be real should be dismissed if there was no place for them in the teachings of the sages.[140] Shinran, Ansai and Sorai thus all advanced a fictionalist position. While it is tempting to dismiss this a mere rhetoric I believe that in *Hagakure* the context of these utterances show clearly that they were not simply rhetorical and that its author had an intuition of a fictionalist theory.[141]

**The Triumph of the Will and the Existentialist Solution to Pluralism**. This idea of modes of existence valid yet deprived of absolute grounding in reality allows us to complete the account of the will by fully displaying its extraordinary power. *Hagakure* repeatedly stresses that the power of the free will is invincible *(Ichinen okoru to tenchi wo mo omohiogasu mono nari*[142]), but it is in the following passage, already partially, quoted, that the full extent of its power appears:

> The hero (*kusemono*) gives no thought to victory or defeat. Without a moment's hesitation he is possessed by the frenzy to die. This is when you understand. *This is when you wake up from the dream***.** (*Kore nite yume samuru nari*)[143]

Here the sheer tension of an undetermined and pure will has accomplished a miracle. Dying for nothing, the hero has shown through this extraordinary feat of will that he is, unlike most of his fellow humans, no puppet trapped in an illusory world. He has overcome the realm of illusions. When it is intense and pure will alone can create value and autonomy, claims the author of *Hagakure* who seems fortuitously to prefigure the sort of existentialism we can read in Nietzsche and Kierkegaard where it is the mere fact of the will in its full intensity – not its object – which insures freedom. [144] The pure will of so different figures as the thief Horie San'emon, the just and noble warrior Kusunoki Masashige, the loyal retainer Sagara Kyūma willing to shame his name, and the innumerable low ranking samurai dying in *kenka*, or for their master or for their faults, lifts – if only for an instant – their being out of shadowy illusion and into existence.

Such a proto existentialist theme of the pure will is what organizes in the most coherent possible way the dislocated message of *Hagakure*, responds to the social circumstances of the work, and finally explains its enduring appeal.

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[139] Ogyū Sorai*, Taiheisaku*, in *Nihon shisō taikei,* vol. 26, *Ogyū Sorai*, eds. Yoshikawa Kojirō, *alii* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973) 452.

[140] Ogyū Sorai*, Tōmonjo*, in *Ogyū Sorai zenshū,* vol 6. eds. Imanaka Kanji, *alii* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1973) 192.

[141] Just like, for example, the context of Dostoyevsky's similar statements about following Jesus even if Jesus was wrong (in *Selected letters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*, Joseph Frank and D. Goldstein eds. (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987) p. 68; repeated in *The possessed* (London: Heineman 1946) p. 225. shows that they should be treated seriously. In Japan the long debates between Confucian and Nativist scholars about the sense in which the descriptions of the Age of Gods in the ancient scriptures could be valid, albeit, in another sense, quite false would also have facilitated this proto fictionalism.

[142] 257, I.143.

[143] 237, I-55.

[144] In the same spirit probably, in an explicit discussion of identity, *Hagakure* remarks of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism that it is simply by being obstinate, by refusing compromise that it succeeded in existing (235, I.49).